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FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9288  
INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1053  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP  
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

UNCLAS COTONOU 000154

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STATE FOR AF/W:DBANKS, AF/PD:LBEDICHEK

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PROV PHUM KPAO BN](#)

SUBJECT: Golfe Broadcasters Convicted of Defamation, Fined and Sentenced to Prison in Cotonou, Benin

REF: 06 Benin 1227

¶1. The High Court of Justice in Cotonou ruled February 16 against Golfe media group President Ismael Soumanou, former Golfe FM Chief Editor/Director Euloge Aidasso, former Golfe TV Chief Editor Joel Ahofoji, and current Golfe TV Editor Charbel Aihou, finding them guilty of defamation. They each were sentenced to six months in prison and fined of 500,000 francs CFA (USD 1,000). Both Golfe TV and Golfe FM were ordered to pay 5,000,000 francs CFA (USD 10,000 in damages). All are free pending an appeal.

¶2. Former Minister of Housing and the Environment Luc Marie Constant Gnacadja filed a complaint for defamation based on radio and television broadcasts made March 1 and 2, 2005. The news segments claimed that Gnacadja had been fired by the government of then President Mathieu Kerekou because of fraudulent management of a project to construct fifty apartments in the Cotonou suburb of Akassato. The broadcasts also alleged that Gnacadja had bought a 4X4 vehicle for 34 million francs CFA (USD 68,000) but had submitted a claim for 54 million francs CFA (USD 108,000), and that he had registered the vehicle in the name of CERTA, one of his private companies. Finally, the broadcast stated that he had embezzled large sums of money intended for drainage channels for Cotonou (the city floods regularly during the rainy season).

¶3. In another case (reftel), editor Clement Adechian and reporter Cecil Adjevi of the minor daily newspaper L'Informateur were freed from jail February 9 after paying a fine of 500,000 francs CFA (USD 1,000). The two had printed a story accusing a bailiff of rape. Adjevi later confessed that he had written the story at the behest of the alleged victim's daughter without confirming the facts.

¶4. Comment: The controversy continues over whether imprisoning and fining journalists and broadcasters for defamation is the most effective way to guarantee fairness and accuracy in the Beninese media, which is known as one of the freest in Africa.

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